

A SPACE FOR THE POSSIBLE: GLOBALIZATION AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR TIBETAN STUDENTS IN CHINA

Rebecca A Clothey (Drexel University) and
Elena McKinlay (Independent Scholar)

ABSTRACT

With growth in China's tourist industry and international trade in recent decades, learning English has become a threshold for determining who can get what others cannot. There are many opportunities to master and become culturally competent in English in the prosperous urban and eastern coastal areas where foreign businesses and tourists are common. Disparities between east and west, urban and rural, and majority and minority areas continue to widen in China, raising the question of how to increase economic development in more remote rural communities. Meanwhile, how minority cultures might remain resilient amid the forces of globalization is a continuing concern. The tensions between globalization, development, and cultural identity as illustrated through an English language program for Tibetan speakers in one of China's poorest provinces, Qinghai, are described.

KEYWORDS

Tibetan education, Qinghai, minority education in China

INTRODUCTION

Increasingly fewer local communities are untouched by globalization in the twenty-first century. With the spread of English through globalization, English speaking has become a more valued skill and debates about its impact on sociopolitical, economic, and cultural domains in non-English speaking countries have increased (Tsui and Tollefson 2007). Critics of English domination view the spread of English as a form of linguistic imperialism, a tool for economic exploitation by more powerful western nations, and a means of displacing local languages and identities (Phillipson 1992). Indeed, Phillipson (1992) described English as a language that "gobbles up others and eliminates local cultural practices" (cited in Yim 2007:43). Conversely, advocates view knowledge of English as a necessary tool to compete in the global economy and international politics (Tsui and Tollefson 2007).

With the growth in the tourist industry and international trade in China in recent decades, learning English has become a threshold for determining who can get what others cannot (Wang 2004). However, opportunities to master and become culturally competent in the language are more plentiful in prosperous urban and eastern coastal areas where there are numerous foreign businesses and tourists. The disparities between east and west, urban and rural, and majority and minority areas continue to widen in China, raising questions of how to increase economic development in more remote rural communities (Postiglione 2006). Simultaneously, how minority cultures can maintain their resilience in the face of globalization is also a concern.

This article examines tensions between globalization, economic development, and cultural identity as illustrated by an English language program in one of China's poorest provinces, Qinghai. Although home to a large population of Tibetans and other ethnic groups, Qinghai is often a less-preferred tourist destination than the Tibet Autonomous Region, which it neighbors. Because it is not on the tourist circuit and there are few foreign investors there, it is comparatively less Westernized than such east coast metropolises as Beijing and Shanghai. This aspect makes the English Language

Program discussed in this paper (henceforth, ELP) a particularly interesting case, as it is implemented in a province where few locals encounter native English speakers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language Teaching in China

China's Reform and Opening Policy (*gaige kaifang*) in the early 1980s resulted in increased interaction with native English speakers and provided a boost to the status and role of English (Adamson 2004). English language emerged as a means of accessing the political, economic, and technological powers of the West; a surge of English publications surfaced, and English became an important course of study for university students. Nationwide examination boards were also created to regulate English teaching and learning (Wang 2004).

English language learning continued to grow in importance through the 1990s and into the new millennium, reaching a point where it was seen as "something more than a language ... not simply a tool but a defining measure of life's potential" (Osnos 2008:2). English proficiency was viewed as a vehicle to study and live abroad, find a better paying job, and be promoted. Jobs for translators and interpreters became more attractive, numerous, and lucrative than before (Adamson 2004). International events hosted in China such as the Asian Games (1990 and 2010), the International Women's Conference (1995), the APEC meeting (2001), the World Expo (2010), and the 2008 Olympics meant that the pervasiveness of the demand for English skills increased in the service sector. For example, new Beijing City government regulations were implemented which required taxi drivers as well as half of the 100,000 Olympic Games volunteers to learn English (Osnos 2008). English is a requisite for graduating from university,¹ demonstrating that English proficiency

¹ For example, Gil and Adamson (2011) note that non-English-major college students must pass the subject College English and the College English Test

is an essential skill for improving one's socio-economic status in China. The simultaneous decentralization of the Chinese economy and the demand for English learning has also stimulated a multi-million dollar industry for private English training programs. Thus, in addition to English being taught in most schools from primary school (grade three) to university graduate courses (Cheng 2011), English is also offered through private schools such as New Oriental, English First, Li Yang's 'Crazy English', and a multitude of smaller cram schools for children. These private English language companies are particularly common in the large cities of eastern China, where disposable income is the highest. Over 2,000 English training institutes exist in Beijing alone, with an annual income exceeding \$287 million. In Shanghai, 300,000 people spend up to \$143.5 million annually on foreign language training (Clothey 2012).

The lucrative English language industry coincides with the geographical location of the majority of foreign residents in China. Xinhua reported in 2006 that the number of foreigners working in China had almost doubled since 2003, to over 180,000.² The majority is located in the large eastern cities of Shanghai, Beijing, and Guangzhou, where business opportunities proliferate. In contrast, there are far fewer foreign residents in China's western Qinghai Province, and thus there are also comparatively fewer opportunities for the province's ethnic minority students to communicate with native English speakers. The disparities in the provision of quality English language education between China's East and West (Gil and Adamson 2011), and overall lower educational and income levels in the Western regions (Goodman 2004) further complicate this situation. In sum, while the demand for English resulting from globalization has created new opportunities, it also threatens to increase existing inequalities.

(CET) Level 4 to get their degrees. However, the implementation of this policy may vary between provinces and within university departments.

²http://news.xinhuanet.com/edu/2007-05/31/content_6177015.htm, accessed 2 October 2007.

Education in China

China has made great strides in educational development since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. The Law on Nine-Year Compulsory Education (*Jiunian yiwu jiaoyu*) was passed in 1986, establishing requirements for attaining universal education and guaranteeing school-aged children the right to receive at least nine years of education, including six years of primary education and three years of secondary education (Dillon 2009). However, educational inequity is a continuing challenge in China, as certain rural areas lack sufficient funds to provide conditions necessary for compulsory education, and some households cannot afford to send their children to school (Postiglione 2006).

This issue is particularly acute among ethnic minority children in rural China. Most of China's ethnic minorities continue to lag behind the country's majority ethnic group, the Han, in terms of education levels and literacy in Modern Standard Chinese,³ and China's minority areas remain among the most impoverished. In fact, approximately two-thirds of Chinese citizens living below the poverty line dwell in rural areas of western China, where there are high concentrations of ethnic minorities (Dillon 2009).⁴ In addition to poverty, fifty percent of China's illiterate population is concentrated in eight regions, all in western China (Yu and Hannum 2006). Five of these are provinces and regions, including Qinghai, that have high concentrations of Tibetans, one of China's fifty-five officially designated ethnic minority groups.

Since 2000, China has undertaken a 'Western Development Program'⁵ (*xibu da kaifa*), in which additional government funding is earmarked for the autonomous regions of Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, and Guangxi; the provinces of Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Qinghai; and the municipality of

³ Also called Mandarin Chinese, Putonghua is the official first language of the People's Republic of China.

⁴ Dillon (2009) defines those having an annual income of less than 625RMB to be below the poverty line. In contrast, the Chinese government defines poverty as an annual income of less than 2,300RMB per year.

⁵ Another common English translation is 'Open Up the West' (Goodman 2004).

Chongqing, to facilitate economic development in these areas. The impetus for the policy was the need to bridge the gap between the more prosperous east and the underdeveloped west. Improvement in education infrastructure was among many specific measures included in the policy (Dillon 2009).

The Chinese government has identified education as a key to increasing economic development in China. It manages "one of the oldest and largest state-sponsored preferential policies (*youhui zhengce*) for ethnic minorities" (Sautman 1999:174) and invests heavily in education in its western regions. Nevertheless, Tibetan rates of literacy and educational attainment remain among the lowest of the ethnic groups in China (Ross 2005), illustrating that the possibilities for economic returns from education are a particular challenge for Tibetans in some of China's most impoverished regions.

Education of Tibetans in China

Similar to many countries, structural reasons are often cited as reasons for poor academic achievement among rural minority students in China. These include (but are not limited to) lack of resources to invest in quality schools and teachers in minority areas, poverty of rural families, and/ or household and production chores that compete with children's school schedules (Bass 1998, Postiglione 2006, and Wang and Zhou 2003). Perceptions of formal education's value also play a part. Friendship Charity Association (2009:4) provides an illustration of continuing education problems in one Qinghai county, stating:

Education has a low priority among herding communities. A recent local Education Bureau policy states that locals must send their children to school, however...[many] parents prefer to keep them at home to work. Parents also point to many college graduates who are 'waiting for work' in questioning the value of education. Consequently, students stay at home, herd, farm, get

married, stay within the community, and repeat the cycle of poverty, poor health, and environmental destruction.⁶

Cultural differences between Tibetans and Han, particularly in language, increase the complexity of providing adequate schooling in Tibetan areas (Caixiangduojie 2011). Tibetan language utilizes a different written script from Modern Standard Chinese. These languages are not mutually intelligible, however, most schools in China use Modern Standard Chinese as their primary medium of instruction. Furthermore, most English language learning materials in China are written in Chinese and English, and do not utilize minority languages. It is therefore difficult to learn English in China without first developing strong Chinese language skills.

Much of China's state school curricula, textbooks, and teaching materials are uniform throughout the country, regardless of ethnic, cultural, or regional differences. The cultural discontinuity between school and community life, shown through the oversight of ethnic languages, identities, and culture in the official school curriculum, discourages some Tibetan students from formal schooling (Postiglione et al. 2006, Wang and Zhou 2003). Tibetans thus face the question of how schools can be integrated with their ethnic values and traditions, and into their community development, while contributing to a rise in living standards (Postiglione et al. 2006).

In many areas, Tibetan students may choose to attend schools that offer Tibetan language curriculum along with Chinese as a second language. However, Tibetan-language schools are less likely to offer the opportunity to learn English, which, until recently, was taught only in Chinese-language schools.⁷ For example, before the 21st century there was not a single individual competent in oral and written Tibetan, who had earned a BA in English, and was teaching English in Qinghai Province (Stuart and Wang 2003). The number of Tibetan English teachers has since increased.

⁶ Though widespread, low perceptions of formal education's value are not a universal feature of Tibetan communities.

⁷ English teaching curriculum reforms were introduced in Tibetan schools from the early 2000's as part of the Nine-Year Compulsory Education policy, and were implemented at different rates across Qinghai.

An additional factor affecting Tibetan education is that graduates of Tibetan schools often do not speak Chinese as well as native Chinese speakers upon graduation, making it more difficult for them to compete in the job market. Perhaps these limited options are the cause for findings that Tibetans have little sense that schools are key institutions to help them integrate into the market economy (Postiglione et al. 2006, Wang 2007).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research builds on the findings of the US National Research Council that learners bring pre-conceived assumptions to the classroom, which are embedded in their cultural practices and beliefs (Bransford et al. 1999). Winzer and Mazurek (1998) state that difficulties in classroom learning arise when there is a discontinuity between the classroom cultures of students and teachers. On the other hand, linking curriculum content to students' cultural backgrounds might enhance student learning, while also enabling them to maintain a unique sense of cultural identity (Kanu 2007).

Drawing on this idea, China has made efforts to promote bilingual education and includes ethnic minority culture, history, literature, and customs in the formal curriculum of schools in minority areas (Teng and Hai 2009); however, such efforts have not been widely implemented (Wan 2004). Some Qinghai schools have authored and published their own Tibetan-language materials; however, no studies have reported the extent of their use. In other cases, trends show a decrease in schools offering minority language instruction in China (Dillon 2002). Tibetan textbooks introduced since 2001 eliminated most references to Buddhism, and in some cases Tibetan cultural references were removed from the Tibetan language curriculum altogether (Bass 2005). Attitudes and practices related to cultural content in school materials have fluctuated over time and place, and continue to do so. In 2011, Bi reported in Xinhua that:

Last October, concerned the Tibetan language may be sidelined in education reforms, middle school students in a number of Tibetan prefectures took to the streets in a peaceful protest.

This refers to widespread discontent over a draft policy suggesting that Tibetan be suspended as a language of instruction.

Many ethnic minority individuals in China express concern that their culture is disappearing, owing in part to the perceived pervasiveness of Han culture and Chinese language (Clothey 2005, Dillon 2002). If cultural loss is a true possibility, then helping minorities assimilate more successfully to dominant cultural values through education will not alleviate such concerns.

This issue becomes more profound when considered within the context of globalization. Three perspectives on globalization, as identified by Held and McGrew (2011), are helpful in illustrating the emerging tensions between local, national, and global interests: hyperglobalist, skeptical, and transformationalist. From the hyperglobalist perspective, "the existence of a single global economy transcending and integrating the world's major economic regions" results in the spread of a common world culture through a global marketplace (Held and McGrew 2011).

The skeptical approach sees globalization as leading not to one world culture, but to greater fragmentation and polarization between cultures (Crossley and Watson 2003), perpetuating the marginalization of poorer nations and groups. Both the hyperglobalist and skeptical approach position local and national interests as helpless amid the inevitable forces of globalization.

In contrast, the transformationalist view suggests that globalization is symbiotic and dialogic, simultaneously shaping and being shaped by external forces. According to Jor (2004:121):

global processes like the travel industry, free trade, migration, diaspora, inter-marriage, cultural hybridization and cultural exchange have transformed people's identity...

From this perspective, globalization requires actors to adapt in ways that allow them to engage more effectively with external forces (Crossley and Watson 2003:55). At the same time, it fosters the

development of new identities that are, "engaged in local contexts and responsive to transnational processes" (Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard 2004:3). Education can facilitate this transformation by fostering in students an understanding of the forces of change and providing the skills to turn such forces to their advantage (Fuller, cited in Jor 2004:118).

METHODOLOGY

This paper addresses the concerns noted above about educating minority communities, especially from rural areas, by focusing on a case study of an English language curriculum that was specifically designed for Tibetan-speaking students. Data for this study are based on three field visits to the program's host institution and the surrounding region between 2001 and 2006, as well as classroom observations conducted during the visits. A description of the ELP from 2007-2012 was provided by the second author, who has taught in the program since 2006. The data were further supplemented by a content analysis of curriculum materials utilized by the program. In-depth, open-ended interviews with four of the program's English teachers and fifteen Tibetan graduates of the program were also conducted between April 2005 and February 2006. Interviews with instructors were designed to elicit the program's teaching philosophy and explicit or implicit purpose. Interviews with graduates were designed to elicit background information about the program's students, the implicit curriculum, and the program's outcomes for individuals. Interviewees were located in China, the US, and Europe. Interviews were conducted face-to-face when possible, and by Skype and telephone. Follow-up questions were conducted via email correspondence. Notes on each interview were taken by hand and later analyzed for common themes using an ongoing process of continuing reflection about the data, as suggested by Creswell (2003). Common themes generated from the interviews were also compared with English language texts utilized by the program. Additional data came from a 2010 ELP survey that was designed by ELP administrators and administered to 121 bachelor's level students in

March and April 2010. ELP staff collated and analyzed the data, aiming to gather information on student demographics, education, experience, language, and family circumstances.

THE PROGRAM

Location and Student Body

The ELP curriculum evolved within the context of combined tensions between global forces, Chinese national education policy, local minority communities, and poverty. Initiated by Westerners and local Tibetans, and in its early years funded mostly through foreign investment, this program at one of Qinghai's key universities is designed primarily for Tibetan speaking students, but also includes students of other ethnicities. China's largest and least populated province, Qinghai is a multi-ethnic region with Tibetans, Hui, Tu, Salar, Mongolians and other ethnic minorities making up around forty-seven percent of its population. The other fifty-three percent is Han Chinese (Qinghai Province Bureau of Statistics 2010). Approximately ninety-six percent of Qinghai's landmass consists of ethnic minority autonomous counties. About seventy-five percent of the ELP student population is from Qinghai (ELP Survey 2010).

English Language Program students are recruited from the four provinces with high concentrations of Tibetans (Gansu, Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan) and the Tibet Autonomous Region, where the educational levels are among the nation's lowest. As an indicator, participation in secondary education in the Tibet Autonomous Region was the lowest in the country in 2006 (Wang 2011).

Before 2007, students were selected based on a combination of academic excellence, peer and teacher recommendations, and face-to-face interviews, and their tuition, room, and board for a two-or three-year preparatory program (*zhongzhuan*) were fully supported. This preparatory program, affiliated with the university, began in 1997 and the last class graduated in 2009. A two-year diploma course (*dazhuan*) was offered from 2000 with the final group graduating in 2010, and a two-year adult bachelor's degree course (*chengren benke*)

was held from 2003 until 2006. Though situated on the university campus, ELP managed these programs with considerable independance, as well as sourcing teacher salaries and student costs. The ELP was fully absorbed into the university in 2007, and began offering only the current four-year English-Tibetan bachelor's degree course (*putong benke*). Recruitment for this class is based on applicants' College Entrance Examination (*gaokao*) scores and in some cases, their completion of a preparatory year of study (*yuke*). Most students' families now support tuition and living costs, though some scholarships are available from the university, through national scholarship schemes,⁸ and from private donors.

The majority of students are from rural areas where a variety of development needs remain, including fuel scarcity, and lack of reliable, potable water supplies. Until the late 1990s, few of the students had any background learning English prior to enrolling in the program, nor would they likely have encountered a native English speaker. The site of the ELP curriculum thus provides a compelling backdrop from which to observe the merging of competing local, national, and global interests.

The Formal Curriculum

Chinese state-directed education builds on a longstanding historical tradition of students silently absorbing instruction and learning by rote (Cheng 2011, Platt 2004). Platt (2004:9), for example, describes the Grammar-Translation method of learning English, utilized in much of China, as a system in which:

grammar is emphasized and taught deductively through the study of rules, vocabulary selection is based on texts used and reading and writing are the major focus.

However, the influence of global initiatives in English language learning led China's State Education Commission (SEdC, now the

⁸ For example, Encouragement Scholarships supported by central and local governments have been offered to ELP students in the four-year BA program.

Ministry of Education) to encourage more innovative teaching strategies since 1986, allowing more local autonomy in curriculum development (Adamson 2004). This policy and later English curriculum reforms by the Ministry of Education (Cheng 2011) opened a space for some curricular developments in English language learning in Qinghai and elsewhere.

Instruction in the program is provided by foreign and local teachers, some of whom graduated from the ELP and then studied abroad. The first two years of the program's English curriculum aim to build students' foundations in the English language. The subsequent years focus on English language content classes such as sociology, anthropology, literature, academic writing, and history,⁹ as well as an introduction to English teaching methodology. The current four-year bachelor's degree course requires students to complete a thesis based on original research with topics commonly focusing on education, language learning, and culture in the students' home communities. Students also complete a teaching internship in a rural school.

Students have between twenty-four and thirty hours of instruction weekly during the first two years, including between six and fourteen hours of English language instruction from both foreign and local teachers. Students are expected to begin communicating in English shortly after they commence their studies. In addition to English, students also take courses in Chinese and Tibetan languages, and other subjects (Stuart and Wang 2003). The emphasis on English instruction in the ELP is unlike most other university English majors in China, which may provide students with one or two hours a week of English conversation with a foreign teacher as a supplement to the grammar and writing classes taught by local teachers (Platt 2004). In the later years of the four-year bachelor's degree program, students study English from sixteen to twenty-two hours per week.

Although the ELP employs foreign and internationally-trained local teachers, it makes a conscious effort to draw from the knowledge and experience of the Tibetan student body. For example, while most State-produced English language learning materials in

⁹ This list is not exhaustive; students may study more than eight English language content classes over the course of their degrees.

China are written in English with Chinese explanations, one foreign teacher of the program noted that a series of English teaching materials, providing texts in both English and Tibetan, had been especially developed in order to, "better teach students English in ways that were linguistically and culturally appropriate." These texts feature English lessons with explanations in Tibetan, with Tibetan names for places and people in culturally familiar locations.¹⁰ Recent initiatives to provide beginning students with culturally familiar materials include locally-made video lessons¹¹ and peer-generated texts.¹²

A more advanced set of curricular materials is written entirely in English, but many of them also have a specific Tibetan cultural focus. The texts include simplified and non-simplified English stories, as well as autobiographies and ethnographic texts written in English by Tibetans (often by students or graduates),¹³ as well as a novel written by a former student that is based on memories of what his grandfather told him. Because these texts are written by and about Tibetans, they describe experiences in English that are culturally relevant to the students who read them. Names of characters in the books, their occupations, the food they eat, and their daily life experiences enable students to learn a new language through familiar means. An excerpt from one of the texts illuminates this point (Gonpo Sayrung et al. 2005:12):

I had a sheepskin robe and no matter if the weather was hot or cold, it never left my back until I was six... My uncle had softened the sheepskins with yak brains and butter, so it smelt strong under the sunshine. In my home area, sheepskin robes were ubiquitous as there was no artificial fleece.

¹⁰ Some of these texts may be downloaded at <http://www.archive.org/details/ElementaryEnglishAbctibetanAndChineseTranslations>, accessed 2 February 2011.

¹¹ For examples of locally-produced English lessons, see www.soku.com/search_video/q_Libenhappy, accessed 28 June 2012.

¹² For instance, third year students create texts for first and second year classes.

¹³ Some examples of such texts are available at www.plateauculture.org/asian-highlands-perspectives, accessed 28 June 2012.

Content-based courses also emphasize local applications of materials. For example, students in an ethnography class may read locally-authored research papers before undertaking their own ethnographic research.

In sum, the formal curriculum explicitly aims to build students' foundation in English through culturally familiar course materials. Meanwhile, students are required by the host institution to take Chinese language coursework that provides a base for national awareness, and the Tibetan language, which connects students to the local context as well. The program's curriculum thus combines local, national, and international content through a combination of coursework in English, Tibetan, and Chinese.

Informal and Implicit Curriculum

Giroux (1983) suggests that unstated norms, values, and beliefs are embedded in texts, courses and pedagogy, and are also implicitly transmitted to students by teachers. In an English Language Preparatory Program developed for Tibetan ethnic minority students, housed within a Chinese university, and taught primarily by western and internationally-trained teachers, what values or beliefs might be implicitly conveyed through the curriculum?

Classroom observations revealed that the program's teachers utilize a learner-centered approach, whereby students are asked to think critically about texts and ideas. Teachers seek and encourage students' opinions and expect them to actively engage in classroom activities. This approach differs greatly from the traditional teacher-centered educational methods and rote memorization widely practiced in Chinese state schools, including Tibetan minority secondary schools. As one former student explained (Interview, 16 November 2006):

Students [in China] are not designed [sic] to ask questions or be critical toward things they learn. Whatever is in the book, whatever the teacher says, is right. I was nourished in the same way. It automatically made me think nothing about the other

people. I just thought everyone [in the worlds]'s situation was like mine.

All of the graduates interviewed noted being taught critical thinking skills, something they had not encountered prior to entering the program. These views concur with those of ELP students interviewed by de Heering (2006). It is clear from the comments of one graduate that she also perceived an implicit message from the pedagogical style of her teacher (Interview, 16 November 2006):

As a student [before studying in the ELP] I was taught unwritten rules that makes [sic] you not speak in class – like a cultural ideology. But in my English classes [our teacher] always asked, "What do you think about it? What do you like about the writer? What do you not like about the writer?" It is very challenging to think in that way. [Previously,] everything was always good – if the book said it. Gradually, step by step, I got used to this [new] education system—I began to think about the right of all human beings to their voice...[Our] teachers inspired us to think [that] what is important is what we think.

In addition to an alternative instructional approach, non-formal learning activities outside of the classroom are also important for ELP students, and are a space where implicit values are conveyed. For example, students are encouraged to further develop their English language skills by doing research projects in their home communities. Supplemental to the formal curricular aspects already described (such as ethnographic research projects for their bachelor's degree and research for generating English teaching materials), a number of students become involved with an extra-curricular folklore project. To conduct this project, students interview people from their home communities, collecting local folklore. Afterwards, the students transcribe the stories and translate them into English.

Another example of an extra-curricular learning experience is recording endangered music. In this example, a student learns how to use recording equipment before going home to collect songs by local singers. They then make DVDs of their songs and photographs to disseminate to their communities. A local organization, the Plateau Cultural Heritage Protection group, facilitates these activities. Such

activities explicitly aim to improve students' English and technical literacy, and to support local cultures by generating cultural products for community use.

These projects also implicitly encourage students to learn more about their home communities, traditions, and customs in a contemporary context where there are few options to receive formal education about these things. Some teachers have helped a number of students to independently publish their written work and media projects in English and/ or local languages. In this way, the students are encouraged to document and preserve local folklore, amid a sea of rapid change due to modernization and globalization. While these goals are not explicitly identified in the curriculum, interviewees regularly commented on the importance of these projects in helping them to learn about and maintain their culture, heritage, and traditions.

ELP teachers also encourage students to utilize their English language skills to join local organizations, write proposals, and seek funding for these cultural heritage projects,¹⁴ and also for grassroots education and development projects. To initiate development projects in their home communities, students seek input from locals on the problems and issues that are most pressing prior to seeking funding. A number of students then write and submit grant proposals to various local and international organizations to generate funding for such community-driven projects. Small scale projects have included renovation and repairs of temples, installation of solar cookers and solar electricity in rural areas, irrigation projects, improvement of schools, and education projects,¹⁵ to name a few. Certain students who successfully sought funding for development

¹⁴ Two examples of cultural heritage preservation projects undertaken by program graduates may be viewed at <http://www.archive.org/details/XunhuaTibetanFolkCultureTheVideoCollection2010> and <http://www.archive.org/details/LenyiTibetanVillagePartOne>, both accessed 2 February 2011.

¹⁵ In 2010, twenty-nine percent of English Language Program students had at some time undertaken culture documentation projects, fifteen percent had completed grass-roots development projects in their communities, and fifty-nine percent had voluntarily taught in their communities (ELP Survey 2010).

projects later established non-profit organizations in order to continue doing such work within Tibetan areas of China. These examples suggest that community work is also among the values implicitly conveyed by the program.

DISCUSSION

Denzin and Lincoln (2008:6) note that culturally responsive research practices, whereby what is "acceptable and not acceptable research is determined and defined from within the community," locates power within the indigenous community and encourages self-determination and empowerment. The informal curriculum of the ELP, that encourages students to seek cultural preservation and development project ideas from their home community, provides a means of empowerment not explicitly conveyed through the English language curriculum. However, this idea is new in most communities. As one former student explained (Interview, 26 November 2006):

I went to local families and asked them, "What is the biggest problem in our community?" Many people laughed at me. They thought I was such an innocent child who thought someone would give us money for free.

Furthermore, while the project proposals are initiated by Tibetan students and are a direct response to their communities' needs, international donors are the primary funding source. Therefore, although the community-driven projects may facilitate a sense of empowerment as Denzin and Lincoln (2008) suggest, they may also maintain communities' dependency on global forces outside of their control. Foreign donations may also come with conditions or with their own set of values attached, and these may also not align with local or national interests. Indeed, the program has been scrutinized due to concerns that the curriculum may diverge from state-sanctioned discourse. As noted, students also indicated they were introducing new ideas into their own communities, suggesting that the impact of the program reaches beyond its prescribed set of courses.

At the same time, while English language professionals have argued that language can be taught in a culturally neutral manner, there is much discussion in the literature about English as a language of cultural transmission (Tam and Weiss 2004). The new type of thinking described by ELP students suggests that the program's curriculum extends beyond merely an appreciation for Tibetan cultural values, but that some acceptance of western ways of thinking may be implicitly conveyed.

For this reason, Held and McGrew's (2011) "transformationalist perspective" on globalization, described in this paper, is perhaps the most applicable. ELP students have fostered new identities that are "engaged in local contexts," but that also respond to the transnational processes of globalization, including the increase of native English speakers in their educational communities. While the new landscape created by globalization processes also requires an ability to adapt to new demands, a transformationalist perspective suggests that these Tibetan students may be able to do this successfully as a result of new identities developed through ELP coursework.

CONCLUSION

Globalization has placed new demands on local communities, but also can facilitate the development of a space where local communities can benefit from resources not previously available, with the appropriate tools. In this case, national curricular reforms in China that were initiated in response to global influences coincided with China's opening to foreign investment and foreign teachers. These events, in turn, provided that 'space' by enabling an unusual English language program to emerge at the local level. As graduates of the program stated, their ability to speak English and think critically provided tools that led to considering new possibilities, and which enabled them to bring benefit to their communities. Ultimately, however, their 'success' in the new market economy requires that they utilize these tools to negotiate the multiple demands of competing local, national, and global interests.

Furthermore, as noted by Jor (2004), success amid the global forces of change depends on individuals seizing opportunities for change where change is needed. For such change to occur, it must also be possible within the existing social structure. While globalization has made the ELP as it currently exists possible, a shifting tide could also bring new challenges that may also need to be negotiated.

Finally, it is ironic that although the ELP implicitly conveys the idea that students may individually take action to contribute to and improve their own communities, some program activities and the resulting development projects may depend on the support of international donors or foreign teachers. The transition to a student-funded bachelor's degree program, a higher proportion of local teachers, and greater local support for projects have reduced this dependency to some extent. Nevertheless, while globalization has created the space in which the ELP can exist and thrive, its sustainability also requires sustained local and/ or national support. Only time will tell whether this will be a reality.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Beijing 北京

chengren benke 成人本科

Chongqing 重庆

dazhuan 大专

gaige kaifang 改革开放

Gansu 甘肃

gaokao 高考

Guangxi 广西

Guangzhou 广州

Guizhou 贵州

Han 汉

Hui 回

Jiunian yiwu jiaoyu 九年义务教育

Li Yang 李阳

Ningxia 宁夏

putong benke 普通本科

Putonghua 普通话

Qinghai 青海

RMB (Renminbi) 人民币

Salar (Sala) 撒拉

Shaanxi 陕西

Shanghai 上海

Sichuan 四川

Tu 土

Xibu da kaifa 西部大开发

Xinhua 新华

Youhui zhengce 优惠政策

yuke 预科

Yunnan 云南

zhongzhuan 中专